International Relations Lab #1: Using Decision-Making Models to Analyze Careers in International Relations

PS 3210: International Relations
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Introduction

This series of International Relations Labs was created to introduce new international relations students to the scientific study of international politics.

The Scientific Study of International Politics

Whereas journalists tend to study international relations with the intent to *describe* (i.e., who, what, when, where) and policymakers tend to *prescribe* (e.g., does policy *x* have the benefits it claims? what are its consequences? how can we improve it?), political scientists seek to *explain* (e.g., does *x* cause *y*? does *x* have a relationship with *y*?). We do this by systematically studying events or objects of interest through the scientific study of international politics.

The SSIP approach was adapted from the natural sciences model:

1. Identify some behavior that needs to be explained.

2. Offer some tentative hypotheses, perhaps derived from some theory purporting to explain that behavior.

3. Evaluate the hypotheses in light of available evidence.

4. If the evidence supports the hypotheses, consider their implications — the additional statements (or predictions) that can be deduced from these confirmed hypotheses (Kinsella, Russett, and Starr 2012).

The focus of this lab is on constructing hypotheses based on theories of foreign policy decision-making. Specifically, this lab acts as a guide through the process of linking theory and observations

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of real-world events to construct a particular type of hypothesis, the *generalized specific explanation* (Van Evera 1998). In class, we will develop this skill in the context of different international crises. On your own, you will apply the skill of hypothesis construction in an evaluation of careers and programs in the field of International Relations.

Theory and Hypotheses

Our textbook defines a *hypothesis* as a "statement that relates a theory to possible observations about the world" (Kinsella, Russett, and Starr 2012: 439). More generally, a hypothesis answers a well-conceived research question and acts as a sort of "punchline" to a theory. It tells us how it is possible that a set of abstract or broad statements are relevant to the day-to-day realities of political behavior (Lepgold 1998; Merton 1957; Van Evera 1998).

Where do hypotheses come from?

Social science hypotheses are more than mere "educated guesses." Rather, hypotheses come from theory. You'll recall that our textbook defines a *theory* as "an intellectual tool that provides a way of organizing the complexity of the world and helps to show how phenomena are interrelated" (Kinsella, et al 2012: 442). More specifically, we look to theories to explain the causal link between different types of observations and events (Van Evera 1998). A realist theory of war, for example, not only tells us that power is related to the incidence of war, it tells us that disagreements about the distribution of power between a pair of countries causes war *because* disagreements lead to uncertainty about who would win in conflict, which prevents states from identifying who should concede in the event of a crisis, which prevents the peaceful settlement of international crises, which leads to war (Blainey 1988).

In sum, a theory is based on explanations that "connect the cause to the phenomenon being caused, showing how causation occurs" (Van Evera 1998: 9). A *hypothesis* is a conjecture about the relationship between the causing phenomenon (or the independent variable) and the causal outcome (the observation or event; the dependent variable).

How do hypotheses link theory to observations about the world?

Stephen Van Evera (1998: 40) distinguishes theories from hypotheses about specific events, stating, "Theories are case in general terms and could apply to more than one case." For example, the theory, "Disagreement about the distribution of power causes war," is necessarily broad. Such a theoretical statement might be less useful to the practitioner who is asked to determine the risk of war in an emergent crisis. Instead, Van Evera offers *specific explanations* as a way to integrate theories into statements about particular events.

A *specific explanation*, "like a theory ...describes and explains the cause and effect [of a distinctive event], but these causes and effects are framed in singular terms" (Van Evera 1998: 15).

For example, where the statement, "Disagreements about the distribution of power prevent peaceful crisis settlement, causing war," is a theory, "Disagreement about the distribution of power between Athens and Sparta prevented a mutually satisfying settlement at the Pelopponesian League and led to the Pelopponesian War," is a specific explanation. The hypothesis would be of the form, "Disagreements about the distribution of power (between Athens and Sparta) caused (the Pelopponesian) war."

In sum, when using theory to explain particular events, you should aim to incorporate the causal path of the theory into the observed pattern in the event of interest.

How is a hypothesis constructed?

A hypothesis that links theory to specific, observed events 1) generalizes to the theory being applied, 2) makes a cause-and-effect statement on the event of interest, and 3) clearly frames a satisfying and politically interesting research agenda.

1. Generalizing to the theory being applied.

    Van Evera (1998) goes on to explain that *specific explanations* can follow one of two types: nongeneralized and generalized.

    - A *nongeneralized specific explanation* is an "explanation that does not identify the theory that the operating cause is an example of."

        For example, a statement, "Sparta caused the Pelopponesian War," is a nongeneralized explanation. The disadvantage of this approach is that it does not offer an explanation that tells us how Sparta cause the war. In other words, we do not know what theory is being applied.

    - A *generalized specific explanation* "identifies the theories that govern its explanation." The example in the previous section, "Disagreement about the distribution of power between Athens and Sparta led to the Pelopponesian War," clarifies the theory that is being used.

    Besides identifying the theory, the advantage of a generalized explanation over a nongeneralized explanation is that it provides us something to evaluate and explain. Recall that the goal of social scientific research is *explain*. A test of the first, nongeneralized statement would merely be descriptive – without additional context provided by theory, the answer would simply be "Yes" or "No."

2. Makes a cause-and-effect statement on the event of interest.

    Some applications of theory do not make causal statements about events or outcomes of interest. Rather, they seek to understand whether two or more factors are correlated. Corre-

lations are immensely useful in studying social scientific phenomena, but our ultimate goal should be uncover whether wars, trade, institutions, or treaties are the consequence of something.

Therefore, hypotheses are usually stated in any of the following forms:

- *A* causes *B*.

- *A* increases/decreases the likelihood that *B* will occur.

- *A* effects the size/duration of *B*.

This is not an exhaustive list, but rather a beginning template for some hypotheses that you will construct on your own.

3. Clearly frames a satisfying and politically interesting research agenda.

As the answer to the research question and the specific application of theory, the hypothesis does a great deal of work to establish what a research project will accomplish. Therefore, Van Evera (1998) lists some criteria for a good theory and, subsequently, good hypotheses:

- "A good theory is '*satisfying*,' that is, it satisfies our curiosity."

  Try not to leave important steps of the process out of your explanation. Van Evera gives a useful example:

  > A politician once explained her election loss: "I didn't get enough votes!" This is true but unsatisfying. We still want to know why she didn't get enough votes.

- Relatedly, "a good theory is *clearly framed*" by outlining each of the elements of the theory's explanation. It should be evident *how A* leads to *B*.

- Last, "a good theory has *prescriptive richness*."

  In other words, it is better to focus on cause-and-effect relationships that are manipulable by policy-makers.

International Relations Careers and Foreign Policy

As our discussion of Foreign Policy Decision-Making highlights, there are a great many more individuals and institutions involved in international relations and statecraft than the heads of governments and international organizations. Indeed, the theory of political survival explains that even the most absolute dictator requires a small group of people to support his or her leadership! In a globalizing world, it is increasingly difficult for any nation or leader to retain power through isolationism.

Therefore, it should come as little surprise that there are a great number of career opportunities that are relevant to the student of International Relations. Many of these careers provide a pathway for individuals to substantially affect foreign policy and international relations, both within governments and IGOs and through private and non-profit enterprises.

As attractive as these opportunities are, Licklider and Rhodes (2009) caution, "Unless one is extraordinarily lucky, . . . such careers do not just happen. They are the result of serious thinking, serious planning, and serious preparation."

The purpose of this lab is to introduce you to careers in international relations with the hope that you will become more knowledgeable and prepared to professionally pursue this field.

The Job Search as a Platform for Conducting Basic Research

The first step to any endeavor, whether completing a class project or looking for a job after graduation, is research. Familiarity with some of the basic elements of *program evaluation* and *systematic research design*, therefore, is useful beyond the classroom.

- *Program evaluation* is a method for studying the effectiveness and efficiency of projects, policies and programs. It asks questions about how the structure or operations of an organization help or hinder its progress.

- *Systematic research design* emphasizes careful analysis and data collection with the purpose of being able to make inferences from those data about a phenomenon of interest.

It is freely given advice that job applicants should research the company that they are interested in, and, for careers in international relations, this advice is especially important. Particularly in careers attached to state governments or international organizations, but also for employment in international business, finance, or non-governmental work, knowing where any position fits within the organization's hierarchy, program(s), and goals demonstrates committed preparation.

Gathering this information takes careful, systematic research in order to comprehend how that position fits within the organization at-large. In other words, researching potential job opportunities is not unlike doing research more generally. It requires a methodological approach, lest you share the Alexandra Lord's (2012) experience:

> "When I began reading ads for nonacademic positions, I read the job titles with a great deal of bewilderment. Associate director? Director? Program analyst? What was the difference? And which was I qualified for?"

Ms. Lord's principle recommendation to navigate this sea of confusion? *Read job ads early and often.*

> "You can never, in other words, start too early. One of my former bosses used to advise that you be perpetually on the job market, even when you love your current position. Starting a job search when you need a job, he would argue, is too late; you should be thinking and learning about a variety of career options at all times.

"Not everyone is so career-focused, but the further ahead you plan, the more successful your job search will be. ...[Y]ou can begin that process simply by reading job ads a year or so before you go on the nonacademic market. The more you read the ads, the more you will understand what employers want."

To make the best use of all this reading, begin a portfolio that keeps track of the terminology, prerequisites, and skills required for each job. A database of this information can then tell you what are the best post-graduate and/or internship opportunities to pursue. Once you target the opportunities you feel best qualified for, an appreciation of the position within the context of the organization – through your evaluation of its program – will direct you on how to highlight your best qualities for the employer's needs.

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Lab Assignment

Directions: Select one career track from the handout, "Careers in International Relations," compiled by Licklider and Rhodes (2009). Research jobs in that career and, in 700-1200 words, answer the following questions, using complete sentences and paragraphs. You may not need to answer all of the subquestions to adequately complete the assignment, only those that are most relevant to your career research.

The format of your paper should conform with the following rules:

- 1-inch margins, all around. Standard, serif (e.g., Times) or non-serif (e.g., Calibiri, Arial) font, 12 point size.

- The heading, which includes the "top matter" and title, should be single spaced, with double-spacing between the title and the body of the paper. In the header, each page should give your last name followed by the page number. For example:

Lefler, 1
Vanessa Lefler
PS 3210:001 International Relations
Unit Lab #2
06 October, 2014
"Policy Analyst with US Helsinki Commission"
Double-Spaced Body

- If you use any sources outside the textbook or the article, cite them at the end of the paper in a Works Cited page.

  - Note that the Works Cited does *not* count toward your total word count.

- Save the document as a **.pdf** and deposit it in the Dropbox on D2L.

  Papers not submitted in .pdf format will be penalized 10%.

Analysis Questions

Gathering Evidence on the Organization

1. What is the career area you selected? What makes this career "international"?

2. What is the organization's mission or goals? Are they relevant to international relations?

3. What is the organizations' institutional environment like?

   (a) Is it complex and hierarchical? Or, is it made up of a loose network of people with a more diffuse chain of command?

   (b) Does it have a specific or general scope of responsibilities?

   (c) Do employees in this organization have general intellectual freedom? Or, do employees appear to follow explicitly specified protocol (i.e., SOPs)?

   (d) Does it exist as a stand-alone unit (as an NGO or business might)? Or, does it exist in a larger network of organizations (as in an IGO or national department of state)?

Foreign Policy Organizations and Decision-Making Theory

4. What effect do you think this organization's institutional environment has on its ability to pursue its mission or goals?

   (a) State your response in the form of a hypothesis that applies any of the foreign policy decision-making theories.

      For example: If you were investigating careers in the United States Mission to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), you would learn,

      > "The United States Mission to the OSCE consists of a multi-agency team with more than thirty staff members from the Department of State and the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as the joint Congressional/Executive Branch Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe ('Helsinki Commission') ("The U.S. Mission to the OSCE" n.d.).

      One answer to this question may then be:

      > The cross-departmental (State Department, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Helsinki Commission) nature of the U.S. Mission to the OSCE may reduce the Mission's ability to effectively address diplomatic issues between the United States and other OSCE members because it suffers from two different principal-agent problems. The first, is that the Mission has multiple principals, each of which may have different preferences over policy and implementation. The governmental politics model explains such bureaucratic competition between the State Department, the Joint Chiefs, and

the Helsinki Commission and finds that it reduces the clarity and transmission of information. The second principal-agent problem is that, with such a complex structure, the Mission staff may neglect or ignore their duties because it is unlikely they will be detected.

This answer relies on two foreign policy approaches to explain the Mission's responsiveness: *Principal-Agent Theory* and *Governmental Politics*.

Gathering Evidence: Individuals & IR Careers

5. What is a typical career track for individuals in this area?

   (a) What are some general prerequisites for entry-level positions?

      i. If you found a specific job advertisement, summarize it.

      ii. If there are no specific job ads, describe a typical career track in this field based on your research of the organization.

   (b) Does it appear that individuals enter this field and become life-long employees? Or, do people seem to rotate in and out regularly?

   (c) For government and IGO careers: Are there special requirements, such as partisan affiliation or nationality?

IR Careers and Foreign Policy Decision-Making Theory

6. What effect do you think this career track has on the organization's responsiveness to international politics?

   (a) Again, state your response in the form of a hypothesis that applies any of the foreign policy decision-making theories.

   For example: One career track within the OSCE employs elections observers – people who work on the ground during elections to monitor them for corruption. Observer missions, and the people who make them up, operate for brief, intermittent periods of time, so there are standard operating procedures in place to guide the ever-changing group of workers.

   Based on this information, it is possible to hypothesize:

   > The use of standard operating procedures among OSCE elections observers increases monitoring efficiency and establishes a reliable set of criteria by which to evaluate the quality of democratic elections. However, rigid adherence to SOPs may make it easier for corruption to be overlooked if it is designed to circumvent the process, and this raises the possibility that elections monitoring may not actually ensure high quality elections.

This answer uses *Organizational Process* to explain how rules and standards to adjudicate elections fairness affects the ability of individual elections monitors to successfully complete their task.

Works Cited

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Rubric

Criterion	Points
Career Track & Organization Description	
Identifies an International Relations career	/2
Identifies the organization's mission	/4
Organizational Environment & Decision-Making	
Describes the organization's institutional environ-ment	/5
States and explains a DM hypothesis for the organization's institutional environment	/7
Career Track and Decision-Making	
Describes typical career track	/5
States and explains a DM hypothesis for the typical career track	/7
	/30

Deductions	Penalty
Source documentation, spell-checking, grammar, format, page #s, etc.	up to 30 points
Too short – Does not meet 700-word minimum	-5 points per 200 words
Not submitted in .pdf format	-10%
Submitted late	-30%
Did not attend lab date	-20 points